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**SONG OF MYSELF**

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# **SONG OF MYSELF**

**by**

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## **Report**

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of  
The University of Texas at Austin  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

**Master of Fine Arts**

**The University of Texas at Austin**  
**August 2016**

## **Dedication**

To my brother Cory Griffin.

## **Acknowledgements**

To my family who is my inspiration and confidence.

To my friends who held me up in sorrow and times of testing, but most of all, celebrated with me in my accomplishments and risk taking.

To my peers who challenged me and taught me about story and life, love and support, and independence as a filmmaker.

To my professors for inspiring me to grow as an artist and giving me space to test out my ideas.

To the city of Austin and the film community for providing a safe haven of growth and resiliency.

## **Abstract**

### **SONG OF MYSELF**

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2016

Supervisor: Paul Stekler

This report summarizes the script development, pre-production, production and post-production of the making of the short narrative film *SONG OF MYSELF*. This film was produced as my graduate thesis film in the department of Radio-Television-Film at the University of Texas at Austin in partial fulfillment of a Master of Fine Arts in Film and Media Production.

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## Introduction

I am a late bloomer when it comes to the articulation of my voice as a filmmaker and I've long known that film school would be a necessary stop. A place where I would have an opportunity to work out the relationship between storytelling, visual poetry and editing. I am grateful for the path that has led me here, and hopeful to see myself continue to distill my voice and practice my craft.

Years ago, I was walking in the streets of Paris with a group of friends late at night and I caught a glimpse of an image that caused me to twirl around. The image startlingly held my gaze. It was a black and white profile of an auteur looking through an old time movie camera. There was no promotional content surrounding the image, just a beloved symbol in a city that adores cinema. I couldn't help but feel a sense of knowing and that was before I knew anything about filmmaking. It happened again years later in a library when I was researching the Russian avant guard symbol of the *Black Square* by Kasimir Malevich. I felt a similar power drawing me in by its magnetic field. These occurrences would continue and I no longer question them, rather I just follow the signs.



The catalyst for applying to film school was my deep interest in the field of film editing. I had worked in fine arts for several years and studied painting and curation long enough to understand the inextricable power of the juxtaposition between two images and the layers of new meaning it creates. Yet, film language was more complex to me. To better understand screen direction and film rhythm became my goal. I felt that I had finally found a bridge between a science and an art, a technical skill and an abstract theology, a practice that I could invest in for the rest of my life. Something I might actually fully commit to. For the past five years, I made the commitment to this understanding and I am very grateful for the direction I have received in the process.

## Development

For me, the inspiration to tell a visual story begins with an experience, a feeling, a perception. It begins like a tidal wave or a volcano on the verge of eruption that I am struggling to hold back. If it persists and continuously strikes me in a place that is truthful, then I make a commitment to the film idea and begin the script development stage. My thesis film *SONG OF MYSELF* is inspired by something very personal. An event in my life that crushed me and tested my relationships, but it also made me aware that my experience was an American experience. I felt the depth of that revelation and thought about the universal implications.

*SONG OF MYSELF* tells the story of an imprisoned drug offender who fights for his sanity in solitary confinement and discovers solace in protecting a blade of grass. My own experience of injustice in the criminal justice system led me to get outside myself to better understand the purpose of solitary confinement, its abuse, and its relationship to mass incarceration in the United States. The film's thematic elements reflect a duality that I have deconstructed with apprehension.

Solitary confinement is a form of torture that has a deceptively practical purpose: to control. Throughout my research, I began to ask many questions like, how does systemic racial discrimination and America's historical use of solitary confinement contribute to its widespread use today? Why would any state sanction its use for juveniles? Holding them in isolation for months, even years. What are its roots and what does it say about America? How has it shaped my life? How does policy reflect fear in society?

From the outset, I was apprehensive because the film's story is based on my relationship with my brother and his experience in solitary confinement in a Florida state prison in the 1990s. I dreaded making sense of the trauma that this experience created for him, me and my family. I felt awkward and almost unworthy to tell the story, but I did have a visceral understanding due to my brother's experience. That feeling is what led to the persistent image in my mind and I dug into my own research based on what I knew was an important topic.

As I began my writing, I committed myself to research for over a year. My research was conducted mainly through interviews with former prisoners

who spent time in solitary, reading first-hand research from psychologists and reporters, and working with a grass-roots prison reform consultant. In addition, I referred to letters that my brother wrote to me during his imprisonment that I had saved, which ended up playing a significant part in the script. My most valuable resource was my brother himself and our many conversations around the topic. The abuse that he suffered was severe and it had the effect of making me tremble in fear and anger. It was important to me that I work that out for my own purpose.

When I imagined what it might mean to tell a story set in a confined space, immediately I thought of the use of 3D, light, and how I might represent psychological torture. Professor Ellen Spiro once told me that I had a gift for getting inside a character's head. I thought it was an insightful statement but I wasn't sure if it was true. The value of not knowing is that it leads you to investigate. What I have learned is that I am simply a good investigator when I feel a sense of injustice. At times I take it to an extreme, often finding myself becoming one with my subject. I become the thing I seek to understand in order to deconstruct its meaning. In essence, I tried to fill the shoes of a prisoner in solitary confinement, yet I retained a humility

knowing I could never really understand the suffering. I felt empathy and compassion but I knew that my feelings alone wouldn't tell a good story.

To tell the story I wanted to tell I needed an experience beyond myself. So I turned to my brother and other former prisoners for insight. After much collaboration, I wrote draft after draft of the script feeling my way through the material. It is impossible to trace its phases. I can simply say that I poured my family history, my research, and my imagination into developing structure and reworked it over and over long enough until it made sense. There was a lot of reworking. The feedback I gained from professors, peers, and my writing collaborators made the story what it was on paper, though I retained the original spirit of my idea in my heart. In the end, three people outside myself significantly contributed to the shaping of the narrative and all three of them had experienced prison firsthand. They knew better than me and I trusted their raw experiences more than the intellectual notions of good storytelling.

Achieving structure has always been a difficult task and as a result of it not coming naturally to me, I have benefitted from the boot camp type of discipline that film school provides. The script received the final stamp of

approval only weeks before we began production. It was a two-year journey and I knew deep in my mind that it had the right feel and it would hold weight. There are so many wonderful details on how it came to be but I will keep that to myself as a writer to remember. In the end, the key lesson I learned was that in order for a story to matter it centers on a key relationship and what's at stake.

## **Pre-Production**

### *Producing a film*

Working with great producers who give unconditionally to get the job done well is a wonderful gift to receive as a writer/director. Thus, I thought about my style of working and the importance of chemistry before bringing anyone on board. It occurred to me that I needed to strike a balance between managing logistics and creative consultation. It is easy to lose sight of the big picture when you are burdened by the nitty gritty of pre-production so it's essential to have a solid support team to keep a proper perspective.

In the past, I was often my own producer and that left me little time to prepare as a director. One small fire unattended can often lead to a fire storm and I knew this production wasn't an endeavor I could manage alone. Also, I wanted the benefit of working with a creative producer, someone who would hold a creative mirror to my face and aptly ask the tough story questions. I hired Filipa Rodriques to work with me as my co-producer, Roy Rutngamlug as my creative producer, and Sophia Yu as the line producer. Together, we worked seamlessly to achieve our vision for the film while we assembled the mechanics of a solid team.

Working with Roy as my creative producer was a transformative experience. Through our conversations and analysis of the script, he held a creative space for me to dig deep and reflect on what I really aimed to say. When I felt overwhelmed, we broke down the critical feedback and looked at what was useful. It allowed me to achieve clarity and focus at key decision making moments. There are no words to illuminate how important the role of creative producer is to me and my process. Roy set a high standard that I hope to continue to meet with future projects.

### *Budget & Locations*

The biggest challenge Filipa and I faced was developing and managing the budget and expectations. Primarily, Filipa oversaw the number crunching and it was my job to find the money. Our numbers would grow and morph as we moved closer to production and we were often hard-pressed negotiating rates for key crew members and the cast. In the end, we were able to balance the budget through a combination of paid and unpaid crew positions. It was a great lesson on how to attract a talented cast and crew on a shoe-string budget. It opened my eyes to the critical importance of



negotiating smart film budgets and contracts. We were very persistent and I didn't give into anything against my gut instinct.

The second greatest challenge was securing a prison location suitable to the world of the script. We needed a modern day prison and a solitary confinement cell. I had heard of the Old City Jail located in downtown Austin, but I knew it was an historic location and I imagined the setting wouldn't be a good fit. However, after our first walk through, I was convinced we could turn it into a contemporary prison setting. We found a space to build a solitary cell and utilize the existing hallways, central booking rooms, offices and bathroom to suit the needs of the story. We signed the paperwork with the City to secure the location and went to work on securing other locations.

### *Production Design and Art Direction*

David Conley came on board as production designer due to his background in architecture and set design. It was his job to manage all aspects of production design, but his main objective was to design and build the solitary confinement cell. David took on this assignment with an incredible eye for detail and we had many conversations about the look and

feel of the cell. I spent countless hours during the development stage researching the design. By this time I knew about the history of solitary confinement and its abuses.

Solitary confinement originally was invented by the Quakers in Pennsylvania in 1829 as an experiment in social redemption. Prisoners would be held in a confined space, naked, with just a hole in the ground for a toilet, and a Bible to read for introspection. The idea being that solitude would bring penitence. This experiment failed terribly but it birthed a movement of control and punishment for the uncontrollable.

David and I took all of this into consideration when planning our design. We designed three interconnected, moveable walls with faux cinder block facades. Included in the cell would be a simple cot with a prison sized mattress, a stainless steel toilet/sink combo, a mirror, a ledge and stool and a window. Beneath the cot, there was a hatch that would allow us to crawl through should we need to get outside the set quickly without breaking apart the walls. We put thought into whether we should have a window and its placement as well as the spacing between the toilet and the mirror. We built a ledge extending from a wall for eating and reading adjacent to the bean

slot on the cell door. It was all thought out according to the action of the story.

The cell door held an important function and we were able to hire a welder to carve out the bean slot. Essentially, the cell we built was designed around an existing cell door opening to an existing hallway that was necessary for creating the illusion of seamlessness between the built set and the real jail. As we worked through the production design details piece by piece, my research was useful many times, but I was still often challenged by the notion of how it might work in the real world. The appeal of production design is being accurate in your research but bending it to your aesthetic ideals for the sake of drama.

In addition to building a cell, we had inmates and guards uniforms to consider including weapons. I was very fortunate to work with film students Maria Situ and Sarah Parrish as my art directors. Sarah also doubled as the prop master and wardrobe stylist. She sewed patches to the guards uniforms, filled their utility belts with fake mace and guns, and even made a chess set out of paper mache, pen, and cardboard. They worked night and day with

David to get the set ready for production and without their assistance it would have been impossible to move forward.

I also brought artist Christa Pallazzolo on board to work as art director for scenes outside the prison. She helped create the look and feel for an important drug overdose scene set in a living room. In choosing set decoration, we used warm reds to contrast against the cool tones of the prison environment. In addition, she loaned us her father's old white Ford truck for a scene between the protagonist and his father. The image of the truck proved to be indelible and a perfect backdrop for a confrontational moment.

As a director, I am always heavily involved with production design. It is part of my skill set and I am a bit ruthless with the detail. It all must fall in line with that one inspiring image that sparked my original idea because it is a feeling that I am after, a marriage between the abstract and the concrete. Otherwise, the set materializes objects that have no inherent meaning or purpose.

### *Preparing for Principal Photography*

Cinematographer Drew Daniels and I first worked together on my pre-thesis film *HUSH* that was shot on location in West Texas. It was my first experience directing a small cast of non-actors and I also doubled as my own producer and production designer. That is to say, I had a steep learning curve and Drew taught me a great deal through our collaboration on that film. Drew's visual style is keen on subtlety, emotional vulnerability and beauty. He quickly sees the essence of a thing and I trust him to interpret the poetic intent of my writing. As a result, I can let go and watch the magic happen when he works.

In preparation for *SONG OF MYSELF*, Drew contributed to the discussion on the design of the cell, primarily with regard to the window and the practical lighting. He also consulted on the size of the cell and the function of its moveable walls to ensure that the set would be shootable. In addition, he gave direction on the practical lighting throughout the prison location at the Old City Jail. Drew has a gift for lighting a scene dramatically with minimal lights.

After sharing reference images with regard to visual style, we agreed that the cool tones in the film *Hunger* by Steve McQueen would be the primary influence for our film. We also agreed that we would aim for a more stylized look than a typical prison film. Other visual references came from scenes in the films *Trainspotting*, *Traffic*, *Bronson* and *Only Lovers Left Alive*.

After we settled upon the film's visual tone & style and cell design, Drew and I met twice to go over the script and create storyboards for each scene. Drew is great at breaking down a scene without too much coverage. If it were left up to me, I'd go overboard despite my minimalist leanings. We collaborated on the storyboards and shot list with Drew leading the way. Drew is unapologetic as a DP and he has taught me a great deal about coverage, screen direction and the power of a long take.

I was confident in what I wanted and I challenged myself to hold my own even if the answer wasn't always clear. For example, when preparing the storyboard for a particular fight scene, I recalled a painting of two boxers by the great American realist painter George Bellows. I shared it with Drew and he loved it, and we later shot that set up exactly on point. Through our

working relationship, I've learned how to be better prepared as a director, share my instincts and desires prior to shooting and appreciate what a great cinematographer can bring to the table as my partner.

We had developed an extensive shot list due to the many scenes in the script and we were teetering toward our absolute max with the schedule. I felt confident that between the talent of my lead actor Austin Amelio and Drew's experience we would be able to handle whatever I felt was necessary. That being said, I knew I was in for a fight to get the coverage I hoped for while keeping the focus on quality.

### *Casting*

My experience with casting is there is no magic formula and it is exhausting work. In the past, I have scouted the streets for non-actors or by holding auditions in small towns. For the lead role in this film however I committed to working with a professional actor. It was important to me that I find my lead before the script was even written so that I could mold the character to him. I get inspiration from an actor's personal experiences and I feel more motivated as a writer when I have someone to write for. Actor

Austin Amelio was my first choice and he turned out to be an outstanding collaborator.

After we made a tentative agreement to work together, I went to work on the script. I decided in advance not to bombard him with early drafts so I took some time to myself in the process. Meanwhile, Austin went on to be cast as one of the baseball players in Richard Linklater's film *Everybody Wants Some!!*. Landing that role motivated his move to Los Angeles where he then secured a lead role on the hit television series *The Walking Dead*. In between those two productions, we continued to talk and I began sharing drafts of the script. There was a point where our communication broke off and I thought I would need to start looking for a new lead. After I reached a more polished version of the script just two months prior to production, Austin fully committed.

I believe my greatest directing comes out in pre-production. My insight and feeling for a character's motivation, what's at stake and what he or she wants is clarified through one-on-one discussions with my actor. It is through these meetings that I build trust, let my walls down and share my vision for the film. One thing that I have narrowed in on that is my secret to



good casting (as well as to hiring a DP) is whether or not he or she can pick up on the spirit of my writing. Foremost, the writing is what draws in a talented cast to commit to a film and it's important that we are on the same page from the get go.

Austin and I prepared by not only discussing the character at length but through meetings with a former inmate who had spent years in solitary confinement and with my prison research consultant, Jorge Renaud. Austin also did a lot of research on his own and we discussed movies that we thought were helpful to getting inside the character's head. There was one particular prison scene from the film *Bronson* with a performance by Tom Hardy that proved to be essential to Austin's preparation for a key scene in our film. I had to let go and allow Austin to prepare on his own. He veered me away from too much analysis to keep it fresh and he was my teacher as much as I was his.

For casting the supporting cast I turned to veteran casting director Vicki Boone. We held two auditions for casting the guards, inmates and father. In addition, I reached out to Lorelei Linklater for the role of the protagonist's sister and Jorge Renaud for the role of the parole officer.

Through these efforts we succeeded in casting a diverse group of talented actors and non-actors.

### *Assembling a Crew*

Patience is essential when assembling a crew. It was evident that the production needed more help than the budget would allow and it was challenging at times to meet the demands of the film. The production design team and G&E department had the biggest needs to fill. Money was strategically placed toward key positions such as the gaffer and production sound recordist. With the efforts of my producers, we put together a sizable crew and I was fortunate to get everyone to pull together and commit to a 10-day shoot in the middle of August.

## **PRODUCTION**

The 10-day shoot was nothing short of intense and difficult. Shooting in a real jail (with no air condition) in a cell that was confining and oppressive set a mood that we couldn't escape. This was intentional on my part as I wanted the location to give off an air of authenticity and make us feel its misery. The first time Austin stepped inside his cell, I could see a change in his demeanor as he contemplated what was to come. It all felt very real.

We spent the first two days shooting the flashback scenes at locations outside of the prison. It was a good way to get into the flow of production and I enjoyed the diversity of the scenes flowing from the street to a comfortable living room. We nailed the skateboarding and overdose scenes and I was excited about the quality of the shots. Artfully speaking, I was satisfied.

A point of tension began to arise within me though and it became a major lesson in direction. It was evident that I didn't have a grasp on giving playable direction in a clear, concise manner in the moment. I knew when something wasn't right and I gave adjustments according to tone, but I often

relied on doing multiple takes until the actors intuited my feeling. It set me up for power struggles throughout the rest of my shoot because it revealed a gap in my communication.

Despite my lack of action words, I kept my head in the game and persevered. Austin and I had already prepared, and we worked together at a subliminal level. My vision was more telling than what I could say or not say.

The production days at the prison was jam packed from start to finish. We covered an unprecedented amount of action from choreographed fight scenes to a deep, dramatic monologue and lingering scenes of isolation. As Austin got into character, he remained there and it was awe inspiring to watch him work. He took what lived within my heart and gave it life on set. It was as though Austin was reading my mind and knew all of my thoughts at a subconscious level. He gave unconditionally to the role that we carefully crafted and never looked back.

Watching Austin become the character, who in essence was based upon my brother was heart wrenching at moments. I was, in fact, reliving some very traumatic experiences from my past but I worked hard to put that

aside and surrendered to the magic of cinema. Things began to unfold and we quickly were in the depth of our craft shaping the story together.

Drew and Austin worked well as a team and their instincts combined made my job easier. It was what I had hoped for and more. I held the power of the story because it was so personal, and I opened up to collaboration at a level that drove me to new heights. I was challenged to my fullest at every moment. Working with such a talented actor polished my sense of direction and I will carry that with me.

The largest challenge I faced during production, outside of direction, was overseeing production design. I was highly disappointed to realize that I had hired a key player that simply couldn't multitask or delegate. He was only really able to focus on his main objective. I could have altered the course of action in advance but by the time I realized this problem, we were already in too deep. The pressure I felt to manage my time between direction and production design put an enormous amount of strain on me throughout production. I did my best to push it aside when I dealt with my cast and kept our production standards high.

I learned it is absolutely essential for a director to have a good support team and we were running at maximum capacity every day. It was often the dynamite performance that Austin consistently gave that provided me with the inspiration to know we were staying on track. It all unfolded in an organized chaos type-fashion and perhaps that is just the way it is more often than not. In retrospect, I realize that a key trait of a great director is maintaining equanimity.

The other great memorable moments from production range from working with stunt coordinator/fight choreographer, Aaron Alexander to directing a diverse supporting cast and prepping my prison research consultant to play the role of the parole officer. We spent hours shooting fight scenes and bloody moments, fishing for a blade of grass, marking time on a cell wall, building tension with gang members, and capturing Austin's rage-filled performance. Building the arc of the story in a non-linear fashion with so many moving parts was a test that we thankfully nailed.

Other highlights are related to the more poetic aspects of my writing being translated on screen. It all worked together to create an interweaving narrative that I would later re-structure in post-production. I feel grateful to

have been given the gift of working with so many talented people and the very act of bringing a community together to tell a story is a life-changing experience.

## POST-PRODUCTION

The editing stage is my favorite part of re-writing and enhancing the narrative of my films. I write with the understanding that I will re-create narrative structure in post-production, building layers of new meaning. It is the art form I feel most adept at and committed to. I try to put some distance between myself and the footage after production wraps. Being close to your material and exhausted from production may be a set up for losing perspective and burn out. Even though, I experienced all of that, I thoroughly enjoyed editing *SONG OF MYSELF*.

### *Working with an Assistant Editor*

I hired Andrew Hernandez to work with me as an assistant editor and we spent the first two months of post getting familiar with the footage and cutting each scene into its basic form. It was a slow process and very helpful to have another set of eyes on the material. Production had wrapped by the end of August and by late October we had a very rough cut of the film. At that point, I knew that the structure needed some major re-working and it was time for me to take over as editor and focus on the overall narrative. We had looked at the rough cut once on the big screen and I was able to discern



the direction I wanted to take. It is essential for me to get away from the computer at least once during the rough cut stage and *see the film as a film*.

### *Delays*

Unexpectedly, my father passed away mid-November and that loss required me to take two months off from the project. It was a shocking and devastating time and it was important for me to spend time focusing on myself and my family. I put the film in the back of my mind and set a new deadline for achieving a final cut by May. Throughout this time of reflection it was evident that I was in for a major test of perseverance.

### *Achieving a fine cut*

Similar to the writing process, the rough cut stage took on many versions. I believe I ended up with at least 60 versions. I went off on tangents at times just to see how far I could stretch the material. More often than not I simply had to go through a dark period where I couldn't see the big picture and kept my focus on the details. It is through the building of the details that I arrive at a structure that is full of subtle layers. Achieving clarity is always my number one goal and I apply discipline even when it feels confusing.

I have learned to accept the vulnerability that comes with sharing an incoherent rough cut for feedback. There is no point in trying to explain why something makes sense to me and no one else. I just accept the notes and look for the common threads of criticism. Without this feedback, it would be impossible for me to navigate through the rough cut stage to achieve a fine cut. I need to hear how another sees and feels to know what's really happening in the cut. Then, I can adjust my inner compass to navigate toward a coherent structure.

My meetings with Professor Don Howard and my creative producer Roy Rutngamlug were very helpful to achieving a re-structure of the narrative. They both picked up on the strength of the relationship between the protagonist and the parole officer as being a dominant thread in the film. I hadn't considered this as a way forward and it freed me up to find a better balance with the other main threads. In the end, my biggest challenge was weighing the protagonist's key relationships and how they contributed to his transformation. What was at stake and how did I want to reveal that?

It was evident that the protagonist's relationship with himself and overcoming his rage in isolation was the soul of the film, but finding a way

into his mind was the greatest challenge. After all, he was a man alone in a cell and representing his psychological torture was paramount. I had to sit with the material and play it over and over again in my head before I could see the way forward. It was all there and it just needed to be shaped toward my original image and feeling for the film.

After months of playing with structure and getting feedback, I finally made some headway. I took the opportunity to share my cut with a small group of people for feedback. Having at least one test screening prior to picture lock is a must. The version I presented was a bit experimental with my use of flashbacks and the main note I walked away with was to work on clarifying the use of time. Playing with time was a big part of the story's structure and I had gone too far. I had an aha moment and finally understood how to open the film. It was an exercise in physics and the complex made simple. By the end, I had achieved a marriage between the abstract and concrete and found the poetic clarity I was after. Thank God.

#### *Achieving the Final Cut: Music, Color and Sound*

Composer Alex Weston is a friend of mine who made a great contribution to *SONG OF MYSELF*. The score that he developed mirrored

the tone of the film so beautifully and with a level of sensitivity that I couldn't have imagined. He willingly provided various versions throughout the fine cut stage so that I could cut the final scenes with music in mind. I am a perfectionist at the fine cut stage and I likely drove him mad with my minute changes but he remained humble throughout the process and quickly made adjustments. Each time he made it better, even when I was already satisfied with his work. Alex will be a long time collaborator of mine.

Sound designer Eric Friend came to the rescue once my film was just nearly picture locked. I knew throughout the entire picture editing process that the sound design would be essential to elevating the film into a real cinematic experience. The solitary environment was so distinct and without a solid soundscape, the audience would be missing half the experience. I was very nervous that we wouldn't achieve a soundscape sophisticated enough to match the psychology of the film. After meeting and talking it through, it was evident that Eric and I were on the same page. I left him alone with the film for a day or two and we re-convened just a day before my final deadline. Eric had sealed the deal with expert sound work and we made

minor revisions together. It was impressive how fast he worked with such little time and consultation.

Colorist Joe Malina made the experience of color correction a dream. We sat together for two days in his office bringing color to the world of the film and it felt rewarding after looking at a flat image for many months. Seeing the beauty of the cinematography come to life made me feel a sense of pride for the work we had accomplished. It also clued me into some fine cuts that I needed to make before I could call it picture locked. Thankfully, we were completing color before sound design and there was still time for minor adjustments. Joe and I discussed how sound and color play off one another and it made me rethink the stages of post-production in relation to the picture editing process.

After music, sound and color were complete, I brought it all into the Avid for the final export. I was tedious in my making my final fine cut edits and there was a level of satisfaction with my work that I had never felt before. By the time I was able to screen the film for an audience, I was no longer caught up in second guessing my edits, instead I had the luxury of

directing my attention to the experience of the audience. I felt relieved of a great and terrible burden that was an honor to carry while it was mine.

## **The Big Picture**

“If you want to have a deep impact on what matters to you, don’t do things at remove. Invest yourself fully. Get close.” — Samantha Power, United States ambassador to the United Nations

Filmmaking has taught me to get close to my experiences and to invest myself fully in telling the stories that matter to me. The acts of perceiving and listening are paramount to my craft and my dream is to continue to listen. Thank you to all of my teachers for showing me that hard lesson and most of all thank you to God for the gift of filmmaking and the beauty of cinema.

## Appendix A

The following is the final script for the principal photography of *SONG OF MYSELF*.

1 INT. BATHROOM - AFTERNOON - SFX

SUPER: TEXAS STATE PENITENTIARY

ISAAC plays it cool despite his fear of being dominated.

He is confronted by a group of MEXICAN GANG MEMBERS. The LEADER, 40, wears a braid and speaks eloquent Spanish, stands in front and three others stand behind him. We see a GASH on the head of the largest gang member from behind. The leader keeps an eye on Isaac, and is real calm.

GANG LEADER  
(in Spanish)  
White boy says that you went into  
his cell last night? Did you?

The gang member shakes his head in denial, and avoids any eye contact with Isaac.

GANG MEMBER  
Chale, carnal. (No, brother.)

Isaac feels the weight of the situation and is antagonized by the inmate's denial. Time stands still for a split second.

GANG LEADER  
So, you make up your mind, ese?  
Your time is up. You gonna let us  
ride (fuck) or fight for your life?

Isaac swiftly pulls out one of his KNIVES from his waist and slashes the gang leader in the face. The leader steps back and one of the members assists to stop the bleeding with a T-SHIRT. Two of the gang members jump on Isaac and try to get the knife from him. One holds Isaac's legs down, the other tries to get the knife. Isaac stabs the gang member with the gash.

*In a broken blend of Spanish and English the leader mocks Isaac and talks shit about Isaac ripping them off (mentions chiva and Isaac's drug use).*

2 INT. HALLWAY - OUTSIDE BATHROOM - AFTERNOON

The lookout is alerted to the guards approaching when he sees the female guard give a signal. She points just below her eye.



3 INT. BATHROOM - AFTERNOON - SFX

LOOKOUT

Hey! Hey! Here comes the juras.

The gang leader heads out quickly before two guards enter and break up the fight.

GUARDS

Lay down! Lay down!

Isaac backs against the wall and is separated from the others and he drops the KNIFE. He keeps his eyes on the gang member he stabbed. Two other guards trickle in and the gang members are escorted out.

Isaac pulls his SECOND KNIFE from his sock. One of the guards films the situation with a CAMCORDER.

GUARDS (CONT'D)

Put it down! Put it down!

Isaac slashes his wrist demonstratively as if to antagonize their reaction. The warden enters in the background. A guard swipes Isaac's eyes with MACE. Isaac reacts but he still refuses to let go of the knife. Two other guards come in. The warden tells the guard to turn off the camera and they beat Isaac with BATONS.

5 INT. BATHROOM / INT. HALLWAY - OUTSIDE BATHROOM - AFTERNOON - SFX

The guards drag Isaac CUFFED from the bathroom down the hallway. He looks down. His heart beats out of his chest and he hears a faint tune... The Song.

6 INT. CELL - DAY - TITLE SEQUENCE

A close up of Isaac's hands. He tests the sharpness of his KNIFE, cuts the end off a BLADE OF GRASS. Blade of grass falls...

7 INT. WARDEN'S OFFICE - LATE AFTERNOON - SFX

Through a grated door, we see Isaac cleaned up. He sits across from the warden, who stands over him. TEARS and DROOL run down his face in reaction to the gas from the mace.

Isaac is belligerent in response the questioning by the warden. The warden asks twice. Isaac repeats Idk twice.

CAPTAIN

You still think you are in control,  
son?

ISAAC

They want to kill me. Please  
transfer me.

WARDEN

Why are they coming after you?

ISAAC

I don't know.

WARDEN

Were they trying to turn you out?

Isaac is silent.

WARDEN (CONT'D)

Where did you get the knife?

ISAAC

I found it.

WARDEN

Alright, let's go, smart ass.

The captain speaks in Isaac's ear as his *eye ball glares* into his smashed face.

CAPTAIN

No hugs for thugs.

8 INT. HALLWAY - LATE AFTERNOON - SFX

Isaac is escorted with a BELLY CUFF with his hands cuffed from behind to the segregated housing ward. A guard holds Isaac's arm with one hand and a BATON in the other and the warden follows. Isaac keeps his head down, face still WATERS from the mace. MURPHY, 21, punches the window of his cell door.

Another inmate in one of the solitary cells takes aim at Isaac through the window.

INMATE 6

Yo, white boy I hear you didn't  
even bleed when they took your  
pussy.

ISAAC  
Fuck you.

INMATE 6  
No, see that's where you got it  
wrong. It's you they's gonna fuck.

The warden's boot steps on an AMERICAN FLAG POSTAGE STAMP  
stuck to the floor right in front of Isaac's cell.

WARDEN  
We don't have to do this the hard  
way (or we don't have to do it like  
this.) Tell me why they are after  
you.

Isaac doesn't answer. The guard hits the back of Isaac's leg  
with a baton. He senses the empathetic eyes of BONES, 55,  
looking at him.

GUARD  
Answer the warden, inmate.

Isaac just shakes his head. The guard opens the cell door and  
pushes Isaac in.

BONES  
Keep your head up. Stay strong!

The FEMALE GUARD approaches and hands a BLACK PLASTIC SACK to  
the guard. The guard drops the sack on the cot and exits. The  
door slams shut. Isaac backs into the bean slot and sticks  
his hands through. The guard removes the cuffs.

9 INT. SOLITARY CELL - LATE AFTERNOON

Isaac collapses on his cot... we see his face close up.

FADE TO BLACK.

10 INT - HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Isaac melts a handful of PILLS into a liquid state and  
injects the drugs with a NEEDLE intravenously into his arm.  
He leans back.

His JOURNAL, a bottle of OXYCONTIN PILLS, PACKETS OF PILLS  
and ROLLS OF CASH sit on the coffee table before him.

Isaac looks up at the TV and watches an OLD JAPANESE SAMURAI  
fly across the screen. He glances over at a PLUMERIA TREE.  
Then, up at a PHOTO of his MOTHER.

He has a moment and stares at the photo. He doesn't hear ALEX, 23, come in. Alex observes him staring at the photo.

She sits down on the couch next to Isaac and puts her COLLEGE BOOKS down. She plays it cool, grabs a piece of CANDY from the table.

ISAAC  
Hey, Sis.

ALEX  
Hey. (beat) How's your day?

ISAAC  
Just another day. Yours?

ALEX  
(dead pan)  
Lousy. (beat) I'm want to move to Paris.

Isaac hands her his journal, and points to a passage.

ISAAC  
Here. Read this part... it's good.

Alex scans the page. Isaac has a list of "7 THINGS I'D DO TO CHANGE THE WORLD." She glances at him. He hands her a WAD OF CASH.

ISAAC (CONT'D)  
Here's the money for your school.

Alex looks conflicted. (She throws it.) Isaac clenches his jaw and fist, and closes his eyes.

11 EXT. ICEBERG - VISION - VFX

Isaac grinds his teeth and he begins to swirl faster and faster out of control... amidst the crisp silence of breaking ice.

12 INT. HOUSE - BATHROOM - BATHTUB - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Isaac is submerged in a white BATH OF ICE. He is curled in a ball from the shivering cold. He mumbles deliriously with his eyes closed.

Alex crowds over him trying to wake him. She is terrified and upset.

ALEX  
Isaac! Wake up!

She puts her arms around him and brings him close. Isaac opens his eyes. We see a quick flash of sadness.

He hears a tune as his heart beats rapidly out of his chest.

13 INT. SOLITARY CELL - EVENING - SFX

SUPER: Inmate #02161989, The Hole

We see 30 HASHTAGS on the wall. The bed is made and room is neat. Isaac sits hunched, naked on a toilet in an almost frozen state in a cold blue fluorescent, brightly lit 6 x 9 cell. His body and face faintly reveal physical WOUNDS.

He stares downward, and his head sways a little, drifting off into space as if he is reliving a memory.

14 EXT. ALASKA - ICEBERG

We flash to a quiver in an iceberg.

15 INT. SOLITARY CELL - EVENING - CONTINUOUS - SFX

We are close up on Isaac's face and experience his terror - we see the sadness in his eyes as he relives his dignity being robbed of him.

Isaac remains on the toilet facing open doors now and he watches his shirtless BLOODY SELF in an outer body experience. In large red, blue, and green letters, INTERNAL RAGE is TATTOOED on his stomach. He sees himself stand passively as the prison guards remove the BELLY CUFF.

The door slams shut. He snaps to. He mutters.

ISAAC  
This surely is a dream.

Isaac stands from the toilet and flushes. We see a SCAR from track marks on his arm. The toilet begins to overflow. WATER seeps onto the floor.

We see a LETTER, a CRUMPLED BALL OF PAPER on a small ledge extending from the wall along with his BIBLE and two BOOKS: *Mein Kampf* and a *Biography of Martin Luther King, Jr.*

16 INT. HALLWAY - EVENING - CONTINUOUS

A female guard peers in on Isaac. Her eyes look over his body with a perverse gaze.

17 INT. SOLITARY CELL - EVENING - SFX

He wraps a TOWEL around his waist and talks to himself.

His vision is impaired and he pounds on the door to get the guard's attention, impulsive and impatient.

ISAAC

Yo! My toilet is overflowing.

Isaac stares at the guard with a cold look of hate.

18 EXT. HALLWAY - EVENING

WATER overflows into the hallway, the guard retreats and walks away.

19 INT. SOLITARY CELL - EVENING - MOMENTS LATER

Isaac sits on the edge of his cot, his eyes are red with fury. They develop tears, but the drops won't fall. He swallows hard to keep the lump burning in his throat suppressed. He SWEATS from the heat.

20 INT. SOLITARY CELL - NIGHT

Shirtless, Isaac looks down at a SMALL MILK CARTON and a mixture of mush formed into the shape of a BRICK from an orange tray. He sweats from the heat. The damp floor glistens.

ISAAC

Fucking bullshit.

He takes a bite, forcing himself to gulp it down. He nearly gags and throws the mystery meat at the cell door. In a fit of violent rage, he grabs hold of whatever he can to destroy before he settles on the floor to calm down. He breathes heavily.

BONES (O.S.)

You've got to stay rooted in reality, man. It's the only way to survive the hole.

The voice emits from the toilet. Isaac stares back at it.

21 INT. SOLITARY CELL - NIGHT

Murphy kicks his door says he didn't do it and isn't supposed to be here. Isaac listens and brushes his teeth then rinses. He looks into his own blood shot eyes in a small dim MIRROR and we see a detached, isolated sadness. The room is suffocating and sterile.

22 INT. SOLITARY CELL - NIGHT

Isaac sleeps on his stomach hunched toward a fetal position with a WHITE T-SHIRT wrapped around his eyes. He SWEATS.

Murphy calls Isaac through the ventilation.

MURPHY  
ISAAC! I got some China White,  
Chiva, Dope.... You want some?

Isaac takes the T-shirt off his eyes, he can't sleep from the heat, noise and hunger pains.

He looks at a small cast of the moon light from the window. He gets up to the vent and shouts back.

ISAAC  
Nah, I'm alright.

MURPHY  
C'mon. I know you're good for it.

Isaac remains silent, and contemplates.

MURPHY (CONT'D)  
Shoot me a line.

Isaac lies at the crack of the door with a JIGGER and shoots A LINE to Murphy. A beat later Murphy shoots Isaac a BINDLE, and he pulls it into his cell. Isaac takes a look at the CHIVA, A BROWN POWDER.

23 INT. SOLITARY CELL - VERY EARLY MORNING - MONTAGE - REVISE -  
SHOW PASSAGE OF TIME

Isaac has been up meditating for days w flashes back to his father and skateboarding.. We see morning light from the window and 90 HASH TAGS on the wall. He lies back against the wall on the floor. DIRTY FINGERNAILS. DARK CIRCLES.

No integrity. He flips through the BIBLE and lands on PSALM 29. The words on the page jump out at him.

ECHOES ABOVE THE SEA.

Between the pages, nestled in the spine, he finds a solid BLADE OF GRASS. He admires it up close looking at its veins for what feels like eternity. His heart beats fast and he hears the same tune... The Song. He speaks to the blade of grass.

ISAAC

What do you get if you gain the  
whole world, but lose your own  
soul?

He snorts the last bit of heroin from the bindle.

24 INT. SOLITARY CELL - NIGHT - SFX

Isaac has the sweats and is sick at the toilet. Isaac looks sideward and ALEX sits on the cot.

ISAAC

I am sure that you will blame this  
on something that happened in my  
life or that I am mad at the world  
and this is how I am fighting back.  
So pick one of them and then write  
me about it and tell me that I am  
wrong. And what I need to do to  
change my life.

Alex's large eyes stare back at Isaac in a searching wonder.

ISAAC (CONT'D)

I got a letter from Grandma the  
other day. She thinks that I am in  
here because I am sad that mom  
died. That is about the stupidest  
thing I ever heard, but I can  
understand it coming from Grandma  
because she doesn't understand the  
way things are now.

He's alone.

26 INT. HALLWAY - MORNING

The female guard comes down the hallway pushing a CART with PANCAKES AND MILK and the prisoners are excited. We hear the inmates clapping.



She serves Murphy and we see her drop a BINDLE and kick it under his door (or she drops it on the food tray).

27 INT. SOLITARY CELL - MORNING - MOMENTS LATER - VFX - SFX - DETOX

Isaac tries to drink from the faucet and listens to the prisoners' reactions.

BONES

Man, we got us some pancakes.

MURPHY

Hey guard! Let me get an extra one.

The guard approaches Isaac's cell. An ORANGE TRAY slides through the bean slot in the door. She walks away.

Isaac eyes the PANCAKES. He sets the tray down and sits to eat. He tastes the SYRUP with his finger.

The pancakes begin to shrink to the size of quarters. Isaac reacts and yells at the guard for shortchanging him.

He paces, rubs his eyes, looks back at the pancakes, they are normal size again. He sits to eat. He sighs deep.

He sticks his SPORK in a pancake and they begin to throb like the ARCTIC CIRCLE. They turn blue then red before melting like water... Terrified, he moves to the toilet, disoriented and flushes the BLADE OF GRASS.

He stares at it going down. His heart beats rapidly and he hears The Song. He realizes what he's done and regrets it.

The voice of BONES comes through the toilet and counsels him through it. Tells Isaac he needs to find inner peace/strength without the blade of grass, and expresses how he copes. Isaac listens.

BONES

Rest your mind, Isaac.

28 INT. SOLITARY CELL - NIGHT - SFX - DETOX

Isaac is huddled on his bed and holds a LETTER FROM ALEX in his hand and reads intently. He turns over on his back. He stands and his hands gesture big and he summons up his own courage. He looks at his bed and imagines that Alex sits there. He crumples up the letter and fluctuates between anger and grief.

ISAAC

So Sis, How's the big, wide world  
of FREEDOM? So, you were say'n that  
"not letting something get to you"  
is pushing your feelings away?

Isaac gestures like he is an attorney in a court room.

ISAAC (CONT'D)

I disagree with that. It's not good  
to let all of your feelings  
surface.

He paces his cell like a professor in a classroom.

ISAAC (CONT'D)

Some feelings like anger, rage,  
stress and greed are very  
destructive. Our power to control  
our feelings is what makes us  
different from animals. You see, if  
I let all of my feelings surface it  
would start off in anger, then  
rage, then murder.

Isaac faces his bed and gets close to Alex's face.

ISAAC (CONT'D)

You will always have these  
feelings, but if you don't let them  
take control of you, they will go  
away and then you can take control  
of a situation with a clear head.

He pauses as if to wait for an applause. Then he sadly sits  
on the floor and leans back on the wall.

ISAAC (CONT'D)

*IF nothing can be done then try and  
forget the problem exists.*

29 INT. SOLITARY CELL - NIGHT - SFX - DETOX

Isaac tries to sleep with the WHITE T-SHIRT folded and tied  
around his eyes. He tries to get comfortable.

His mouth is parched and his lips are chapped. He yanks off  
the T-shirt and gets up. A TRICKLE OF WATER pours out of the  
sink and he tries to quench his thirst.

Isaac sits back down and folds the T-shirt around his eyes.  
He tries to get coverage with a thin WHITE SHEET and  
struggles with it.

30 INT. SOLITARY CELL - NIGHT - SFX - MOMENTS LATER

He settles into a subtle childlike snore. His mouth slightly pursed in an oval shape. His arm hangs overs the edge of the cot like a child.

31 EXT. ALASKA - ICEBERG - NIGHT TERROR - VFX

Isaac drifts slowly on a large piece of ice toward an enormous melting iceberg. The sky is smooth like glass amidst the white and blue formations. Small islands of ice drift toward the horizon.

He sleeps naked, trembling, curled in a ball from the shivering cold, and his white body bears tattoos. Chunks of ice melt around him. He is paralyzed from the cold and there is no escape.

Isaac grinds his teeth and he begins to swirl faster and faster out of control... amidst the crisp silence of breaking ice.

32 INT. SOLITARY CELL - NIGHT - SFX - DETOX

The WHITE SHEET is now twisted around his body and we hear the drip of the faucet.

Fluorescent light hits the small bone of Isaac's shivering ankle, and the hairs on his leg. We see the dark shadows beneath his slightly curled up knees, the gleam of his thigh muscle, the curl of his lower back, and the shadows between his shoulders.

A BLACK SNAKE slivers up his legs and over his spine. Isaac shivers and rips the T-SHIRT from his eyes. Alert, his body shudders again but he sees nothing. He looks around and beneath the bed.

A look of shame overcomes him. He sits there paralyzed. His feet planted on the floor, he stares off, downcast. He gets up to splash water on his face from the toilet and he sees the blade of grass floating. He grabs it before he drinks from the toilet and he recoils on the floor into a child's pose. The feeling is that he is human and needs to be close to someone. He SWEATS yet he shivers like its cold. He goes into a detox fit. Alex appears on the bed. We see the distance between them.

ALEX

Isaac.

Isaac begins to cry, but is stifled. Then he gets up and sits on his stoop, he breathes heavy. He feels a wave of panic and mumbles. He is angry. Then he starts to cry again. He feels another wave.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
Isaac, I'm here.

Isaac looks at his sister, as though he's seeing her for the first time. She puts her arms out for him to come sit. We see the distance between them begin to close. He reluctantly sits next to her. His hands ball up into fists, he's angry again. She puts her arm around him, and Isaac relents. He starts to cry heavily. He mumbles something about being betrayed.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
Who betrayed you Isaac?

ISAAC  
You know.

She thinks about it and we see the recognition in her face.

ALEX  
You got this.

Isaac rests close to his sister as he calms down.

33 EXT. PRISON - NIGHT

We see the prison yard and barb wire fences.

34 INT. SOLITARY CELL - NOON

We see 150 HASHMARKS on the wall. Isaac is more clear eyed and sober. He has been cleaning his cell, and wipes his sink down with a RAG, then he calls Murphy through the vent. There is a CHESS BOARD drawn in the center of Isaac's cell on the floor. CHESS PIECES are made out of toilet paper, toothpaste and ink.

ISAAC  
Murphy, let's play some chess.

Murphy is high and doesn't make sense. Murphy seductively slurs his words. Isaac feels sensations in his body.

ISAAC (CONT'D)  
Hey, man you there?

MURPHY

I whooped your ass the other day. I don't think you have a chance, but sure I'll play you.

35 INT. SOLITARY CELL - NOON - MONTAGE

Isaac moves for himself and Murphy on the CHESS BOARD. We hear them shout out their moves amidst cacophony of prison sounds.

36 INT. HALLWAY - AFTERNOON

The Mexican GANG LEADER and GANG MEMBER from the fight are escorted into solitary cells down the hall, one at a time.

37 INT. SOLITARY CELL - AFTERNOON

Isaac waits for a beat and pulls a line into his cell. He reads a NOTE attached. Isaac paces deep in thought. He puts his hands on the sink, and looks down in contemplation. He splashes water on his face from the toilet, and brushes his teeth.

38 INT. SOLITARY CELL - NIGHT

Isaac puts all of his BOOKS, NOTE PADS, and BLADE OF GRASS under his bunk and prepares for a fight.

39 INT. SOLITARY CELL - NIGHT

Isaac takes his T-SHIRT off and waits, crouched on the floor. We get down to his level and see the intensity of his gaze.

Time seems to stop, then we hear the lock on the cell door pop.

The gang members enter his cell quietly. Isaac is crouched and remarks with a wise-crack.

ISAAC

It's not me you really hate, it's yourself. Or as Rodney King said, "Can we all just get along?"

Isaac fights the gang members. They beat his ass.

40 INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

We see the empty hallway.

41 OMITTED

42 EXT. PRISON - SUN RISE

We see the prison yard and barb wire fences.

43 INT. SOLITARY CELL - MORNING - SFX

Isaac eats breakfast of OATMEAL. He is beat up. Murphy is sober. Murphy calls Isaac on the vent and brags about how great his high was. Tells Isaac he has a little left, if he wants some. We see clarity in Isaac's eyes and he declines.

Guards bang at Isaac's door.

GUARD

Get up. Shake down.

Isaac knows the routine and is slow to get up.

GUARD (CONT'D)

Back away from the door. Get out of em.

Isaac stands at the back of the cell where the guards can see him and he strips down.

Isaac gets cuffed.

44 OMITTED

45 INT. HALLWAY - MORNING - SFX

Isaac stands cuffed in his WHITE BOXERS in the hallway. A guard holds his arm with a BATON in one hand.

The cell door is open and guards looks through every nook and cranny of his cell. They look in the toilet with a FLASH LIGHT, tear the photos from the wall, flip through his books, flip the mattress, toss the sheets.

The guards finish and walk down the hallway and we see the blade of grass has floated a few cells down as the guards boots trample past. Isaac walks into his messed up cell and looks at it.

46 INT. SOLITARY CELL / INT. PRISON HALLWAY - MORNING - MOMENTS  
LATER - SFX

Isaac wears only BOXERS. We see a torn sock and he ties a  
LONG LINE OF STRING and to his FINGER NAIL CLIPPER. He begins  
to fish patiently trying to get the blade of grass back.

From the hallway, we see his LINE fishes for the BLADE OF  
GRASS. A guard comes down the hallway with a SWEEPER BROOM  
increasing the tension.

Very patiently, painstakingly Isaac pulls the blade of grass  
back to his cell. It is nearly broken in half. He looks at  
it.

48 OMITTED

49 INT. SOLITARY CELL - NIGHT - SFX

Isaac eats his STEW with a SIDE OF RICE and MILK. The broken  
blade of grass sits next to him.

He repairs the blade of grass with a PIECE OF RICE.

50 INT. PRISON - HALLWAY / INT. SOLITARY CELL - MORNING - SFX

We see the hallway and BLOOD trickles out from beneath  
Murphy's cell door. A beat later a guard in the picket sees  
the blood and checks the cell with a FLASHLIGHT. He steps in  
the blood and is pissed.

Isaac hears the crackle of the WALKIE TALKIE and looks out  
his cell door window.

The guard backs away from the cell and speaks into his WALKIE  
TALKIE. We see BLOOD smeared on the interior of the cell  
window.

GUARD  
Cell 319. We got a suicide.

He walks away with blood on his shoe.

51 OMITTED

52 OMITTED

53 INT. SOLITARY CELL - DAY

Isaac looks out the window. We see day go to night.

55 INT. SOLITARY CELL - MORNING - ENLIGHTENMENT - SFX

A cast of light emerges from the small window and we see 250  
HASHMARKS on the wall. On the wall is a DRAWING OF A MAN  
MEDITATING with musical notes intertwined in the rays of  
light coming to and fro. Isaac is huddled on his bed.

He opens his eyes, and listens. His hair is clean and his  
fingernails are clean. He lies on his bed and his eyes often  
blink repeatedly as if trying to ground himself in reality.  
He writes on a WHITE LEGAL PAD.

ISAAC  
DO I EXIST?

We zoom into his eyes.

56 EXT. ALASKA - OCEAN - VFX

Dark seas of betrayal become an eerily calm ocean.

57 INT. SOLITARY CELL - NIGHT - ENLIGHTENMENT - SFX - REVISE -  
MONTAGE

The moon light highlights 360 HASH TAGS and A SERIES OF  
DRAWINGS posted on the wall of monks playing different  
instruments beneath the stars.

Isaac has learned to block out the noise. He is writing and  
we see PAGES AND PAGES OF WORDS, one after the other.

We see him pray and be active in various positions around the  
room.

58 INT. SOLITARY CELL - DAY

Isaac looks in the mirror and fixes his hair.

59 INT. DAY ROOM - PAROLE HEARING - DAY

Isaac stands cuffed in front of the INSTITUTIONAL PAROLE  
OFFICER. The officer is Hispanic. He works to put Isaac at  
ease and addresses him by his last name, respectfully.



PAROLE OFFICER  
Hello, Mr. Mullins.

He looks at ISAAC'S THICK FILE OF PAPERWORK and inquires about Isaac's mental state and asks him a series of questions. We don't always hear Isaac's response. The questions just come at him, until the final question.

PAROLE OFFICER (CONT'D)  
Isaac, why should I let you go?

Nervously, Isaac clears his throat. He starts to deliver his statement. He puts the paper down and looks at the officer.

ISAAC  
You don't have to let me go now,  
but I'm not the person I was.  
Whether, I am in here or out there,  
I am in control of me. I do believe  
that peace of mind can be obtained  
in the face of the worst horrors  
and losses. Prison has taught me  
one thing. Cherish what you have  
because you might not get it back,  
never. I'm going to choose the  
right thing.

60 INT. SOLITARY CELL - DAY

The bed is neatly made, and a TOOTH BRUSH sits on the sink but Isaac is gone. We feel the empty space. We see details of the cell and blade of grass left behind from Isaac's POV...Isaac gets cuffed and takes one last glance before the metal door closes.

61 INT. PRISON HALLWAY - DAY - ENLIGHTENMENT

Isaac walks with his hands cuffed from behind.

62 INT. FRONT HALLWAY - DAY

A GUARD works at the COMPUTER behind glass. Isaac now wears his FREE WORLD CLOTHES, and he is escorted by a guard. He stops at the booking window to get his property.

He turns to face the exit. Isaac hears no one, except when he is commanded to STOP. WAIT.

GUARD  
Pop the gate.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD - STREET - EARLY MORNING - FLASHBACK

Alone on an empty street amidst a twilight sky, Isaac glides on his SKATEBOARD.

He carefully SURVEYS the NATURAL ENVIRONMENT. A colorful balance of green foliage and urban neon blasts his eyes.

He is a free spirit with a tough exterior. Effortlessly, his foot pushes off the cement.

His pace increases and we feel his adrenaline as he bombs down a hill. His internal rhythm is a perfect balance of expansion and constriction.

EXT. FORD TRUCK - NEIGHBORHOOD - MORNING

Isaac stands stiff while his father looks at him expectantly. His father leans against the bed of his truck. Isaac raises his hands in the air.

ISAAC

What do you expect me to do, Dad?  
What do you want to hear?

His father pauses to think.

FATHER

Do you remember when I was on the  
8th floor of the jail and you were  
on the 3rd? You really want to go  
back to that hotel?

ISAAC

C'mon, man, I know what I'm doing.  
(beat) Quit spying on me.

FATHER

I am out here working.

ISAAC

I am, too.

FATHER

Let me tell you something. I've  
come face to face with death by  
being an extremist. And that's fun  
when you're young - no self  
control, no discipline. I never saw  
a bad. Then your mom got sick. I  
lost all my land, my money, my  
house, all at once.

Isaac senses vulnerability in his father's tone...

FATHER (CONT'D)

All of sudden, I see this little computer nerd running down the road with a suitcase full of money and I scratch my head wondering where I went wrong...

ISAAC

Yeah.

His father sees track marks on Isaac's arm.

FATHER

When I grew up there were no laws . Now there are too many laws. And the stuff is stronger. You're not looking ahead. I always looked ahead when I was traveling through dangerous lands to make sure that I was safe. (beat) You're young, get a job. Get out of the drug business and into the...computer business. That pays. It's not if you're gonna get caught, it's when. It's not if your gonna OD on those pills, it's when. That stuff, it turns into honey inside your veins and you have a blood clot, then you die.

Isaac looks down.

FATHER (CONT'D)

Your gonna get crushed... like a pot.

## **Appendix B**

The following are the production design models for the prison cell.











